

Climate change crisis reflected in Niagara's rising temperatures

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Body

Nima Asadi crunched the numbers on historical temperature data in Niagara over the last 120 years or so and what he found isn't good.

From 1900 to 2021, the masters student at Brock University found the average temperature in this region climbed 2.24 C.

That may not sound like much, but Asadi said that is a "concerning trend" that bodes poorly for everything from government infrastructure such as roads crumbling due to fluctuating freeze-thaw cycles to Niagara's iconic ice wine that's seen the number of days with the right temperature to harvest grapes plummet by 24 per cent.

"The climate crisis is an urgent matter," he told about 100 people gathered outside of St. Catharines city hall Sunday afternoon for a climate change rally organized by 50by30 Niagara, a grassroots organization working towards getting municipalities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this region.

50by30 founder Herb Sawatzky of Fenwick said city and town governments account for 50 to 60 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions in Canada and 80 per cent of those emissions come from buildings and vehicles.

His group is fighting for local governments to commit to ambitious steps such as a hard target of net-zero emissions by 2050, looking at all actions such as planning decisions through a climate lens, mandating mixed-use, higher-density developments to promote walkable cities and having no new home or building construction heated or cooled with fossil fuel energy.

"We want to see municipalities take solid climate action," he said.

Sawatzky said the climate crisis can be tackled, but only if residents make it clear to politicians that it's a top priority to them.

"It's not going to be easy," he said. "(But) it's not insurmountable. It's not impossible. It's not like it can't be done."

People at the rally carried signs with slogans such as 'No jobs on a dead planet' and 'There's no planet B,' while the Strong Water Singers performed in front of a banner reading 'Our house is on fire' with an image of the Earth burning.

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Asadi said municipal steps such as dimming streetlights in the wee hours of the night and people opting to carpool, bike or walk instead of driving, choosing sustainable diets using locally sourced food and turning thermostats up a couple of degrees in the summer and down a couple of degrees in the winter can begin to make a difference.

"Local governments play a crucial role in mitigating the impacts of climate change," he said. "In Niagara, we have the opportunity to be a climate leader (but) we need to take concrete steps."

"We can make a big difference by making small changes in our daily lives."

Sabrina Shawana with the Strong Water Singers said it was good to see so many people gathered over the issue of climate change, noting Indigenous people have long felt alone in their efforts to save this planet.

"The fight that we've had to maintain Mother Earth and to see Mother Earth as a living entity has kind of been a lonesome journey up to this point: we haven't had a lot of allies," she said. "Looking out at the crowd today, I'm so honoured and excited to see so many faces here to stand with us in solidarity to honour the Earth as our mother."

Shawana likened the Earth to being the ultimate single mother. "She gives and she gives and everybody kind of overlooks her and never really gives her any appreciation," she said.

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